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How God Relates to Evil in the Book of Job

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Abstract

How does God relate to evil and suffering in the book of Job? Different understandings of the providence of God, creaturely freedom, and evil have given rise to a number of responses. The Calvinist model of God's providence maintains that everything is determined by God and divinely ordained. The openness of God model argues that both God's knowledge of the future and his ability to control every event are limited and contingent upon the actions of his creatures to whom he gave freedom. However the prologue of Job (2:1 and 2:10) clearly demonstrates that the activity of הַשָּׂטָן is restricted to God's permission. As far as the author of Job was concerned, God exercises absolute control over הַשָּׂטָן, suffering and evil.

I. Introduction

One of the hottest debates in current theological circles is "the openness of God" controversy. Behind the emergence of the openness model of God, there are some serious questions. How does God relate to evil and suffering? Is God sovereign over everything that happens in the world even if it is evil? Different understandings of the providence of God, creaturely freedom, and evil have given rise to a number of responses to the above questions.

The purpose of this paper is to envisage a unique voice for the book of Job and consider its systematic and biblical theological contribution to the recent debate regarding the problem of evil (in particular הַשָּׂטָן) and God's relation to evil. In this paper, the present writer does not attempt to answer the question of why evil takes place at all in God's universe but rather how God relates to evil.

The thesis statement is as follows: In God's universe, God permits evil and suffering, even the activity of הַשָּׂטָן, all according to his sovereign plan. In order to support the above thesis, there are three considerations. First, the present writer will elaborate on the theological context of the current controversy between classical theism and open theism. Because

of limited space, the study will only deal with "God's providence and evil." Second, in dealing with God's relation to evil within the book of Job, the identity and role of הַשָּׂטָן in the prologue of the book of Job is crucial. Thus, this study will discuss the identity and role of הַשָּׂטָן in the prologue, through an exegesis of Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-7, utilizing semantic and syntactic analyses and interacting with biblical scholars. Third, the theological discussion on evil (in particular הַשָּׂטָן) within the scope of the prologue of Job will be examined. The present writer will evaluate the arguments of several scholars (John Calvin, Terrance Tiessen, and Gregory Boyd) in the light of the narrative of the prologue of Job.

II. Two Views on Providence and Evil

The crux of the current openness debate arises from how tragedies that befall us may be explained theologically. In the response to suffering and evil in the world, the theological understanding of God's providence is at stake.

Calvinist Theology

The Calvinist model of God's providence maintains that everything is determined by God and divinely ordained. God's divine ordination then is coordinate with creaturely freedom. Even if creatures do what they want to do, what they do is under God's incomprehensible counsel.

When Calvin, a founding father of Reformed theology, elaborates on God's providence, he primarily speaks of God's special care for his creature. He understands that God's providence does not merely mean that he preserves the order of nature, but also that he continues "a peculiar care of every single creature that He has created."[1] In explaining God's secret counsel that governs the world, Calvin also emphasizes our attitude of modesty and sobriety to acquiesce to his supreme authority over all occurrences in the world.[2]

For the Calvinist, God is independent of the universe and a self-existing being who upholds the universe. The whole creation is totally dependent on God. The vertical dimension of God's relation to his creature is an important theological axis, without compromising the hori-

[1] John Calvin, *Calvin's Calvinism: A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God* (trans. H. Cole; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 224.

[2] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (trans. H. Beveridge; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 185. Calvin points out that the providence of God is an incomprehensible mystery in order to keep our minds humble as human beings.

zontal causal relations. Calvin emphasizes this vertical aspect that "the Will of God is the one principal and all-high cause of all things in heaven and earth!"[3] Wishing to avoid any sense of conflict between primary and secondary causes, Paul Helm explains the relation between them:

> The primary cause is an enabling and sustaining cause, making possible secondary causes and setting bounds to them. The second point is that the primary cause is not an event in time, as the secondary causes are, but an eternal cause which has the whole of the creation as its effect.[4]

There is no independent power in the secondary causes and God alone works through the secondary causes. The above view was also widely held by Christian theologians such as Aquinas and Calvin.

Having discussed the Calvinist view of God's providence, the question remains of the place of evil in a world created by God. How is a righteous and all-good God related to moral and physical evil? We now turn to the Calvinist's response to evil.

Refuting a distinction between what God wills and what he permits, Calvin asserts that evil and wickedness are merely God's instruments as "he directs their malice to whatever end he pleases, and employs their iniquities to execute his judgments."[5] Even the work of Satan is under God's control. Calvin contends:

> God, by holding Satan fast bound in obedience to His Providence, turns him whithersoever He will, and thus applies the great enemy's devices and attempts to the accomplishment of His own eternal purpose.[6]

In spite of Calvin's hesitancy to employ the term "permission," many Reformed theologians freely use it. Calvinistic theologian G. C. Berkouwer explains that in Reformed theology, "permission" was used on account of "determinism" and "a desire to express the thought that good and evil do not originate in the same way, as an effect of one general Divine causality."[7] Helm, who holds to divine compatibilism, points out that God uses instruments, even evil ones, to fulfill his plans "without either detracting from the evil of their intentions or contaminating

[3] Calvin, *Calvin's Calvinism*, 246.

[4] Paul Helm, *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 86.

[5] Calvin, *Institutes*, 198.

[6] Calvin, *Calvin's Calvinism*, 240.

[7] G. C. Berkouwer, *The Providence of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 147-53. Regarding divine permission, see also Roger Hazelton, *God's Way with Man: Variations on the Theme of Providence* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), 58–85.

himself by such use."[8] Terrance Tiessen provides a middle knowledge view of providence. For Tiessen, God not only knows the actual future, which he determined, but also God possesses the knowledge of how creatures would respond to particular situations.[9] This view includes both deliberate divine action and deliberate divine permission. Regarding the problem of evil, he posits that God knows that the evil would occur under certain circumstances, but "in God's goodness and wisdom he has decided to permit some of these evils because of a good that is served by them, even for the creatures who suffer those evils."[10]

Even though solutions vary, most Calvinistic theologians explain God's relation to the world in such a way that God is the first and primary cause of every occurrence in the world (the special and meticulous providence) and yet avoid the notion that God is the author of evil. Concerning evil, God never takes risks.

Openness Theology

In recent years numerous Christian theologians and philosophers of religion have rejected the Calvinist model of God (what they called the classical theist model of God). They primarily challenge the classical understanding that God is omniscient of everything in the future.[11] They believe that God does not have exhaustive or meticulous knowledge of what will happen in the future. For the proponents of the openness of God model, not only God's knowledge of the future but also his ability to control every event within creation is limited and contingent upon his creatures that he gave libertarian freedom. The fundamental reason for this kind of understanding of God is the focus on the reciprocal and loving relationship between God and his creatures. God's love for his creatures makes room for their free choice and his vulnerable relation with them. Clark Pinnock elaborates on his picture of God's sovereignty:

> Who takes risks and jeopardizes his own sovereignty in order to engage in historical interactions with created reality. The triune God purposes this path out of the love that is fundamental to his very being. . . . It

[8] Helm, *Providence* of *God*, 109.

[9] For a more detailed explanation, see Terrance Tiessen, *Providence* & *Prayer* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 289–330.

[10] Ibid., 330.

[11] This openness view of God was first introduced by Clark Pinnock et al., eds., *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994) with contributions by Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger.

> portrays God as the author of history who delights in meaningful interaction with creatures as his purposes for the world are realized.[12]

Arguing against specific sovereignty, John Sanders, too, claims that God is open and responsive to what his creatures do, and that his will can be thwarted by human action.[13] Sanders maintains general sovereignty, which means God has established a general framework for meaning and permits his creatures to act freely within it.[14] He argues, "God chooses to macromanage most things while leaving open the option of micromanaging some things."[15] God's deliberate intention is for the creatures to be free. This view opens a way for creaturely activity to determine outcomes independent of God's will. Then, how do openness theologians approach the problem of evil?

The openness theologian asks the classical theist a tough question regarding the problem of evil. As Hall and Sanders put it, "If every evil that occurs is part of God's sovereign plan and is for the ultimate good, then how can the classical theist claim that God acted against the very evil he ordained in the first place?"[16] This critical question arises against the exhaustive sovereignty of God. Those who affirm an open view of God do not believe that God has a single purpose for each evil and suffering that people experience. Sanders discusses the problem of evil in terms of the logic-of-love defense.[17] He asserts that in order to maintain a reciprocal loving relation with humans, God must exercise general sovereignty, which provides the reason why God does not prevent all evil.[18] Otherwise God would make the human his puppet. David Basinger insists that much of evil and suffering that befall upon people may be gratuitous and may not lead to any greater good.[19] Then from where does the evil originate if not deliberately caused or at least permitted by God? Basinger answers that "such evil was an undesired byproduct of

[12] Pinnock, *Openness*, 125.

[13] John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 208-36. Adapting Brummer's typology, Sanders proposes the concept of the outworking of divine project in Scripture: "God in his sovereignty structured the rules of the game for personal loving relations of fellowship, not manipulative or contractual relations."

[14] Ibid., 213. Sanders also insists that general sovereignty can be best explained in terms of a "give-and-take relationship" between God and his creature because God desires a loving relationship with his creation.

[15] Ibid., 235.

[16] Christopher A. Hall and John Sanders, "Does God Know Your Next Move?" *Christianity Today* 45, no. 7 (May 2001): 38-43.

[17] Sanders, *God Who Risks*, 257-68.

[18] Ibid., 258.

[19] Pinnock, *Openness of God,* 168-71.

misguided human freedom and/or the normal outworking of the natural order."[20]

Currently, along with the basic framework of the openness model of God, Gregory Boyd, one of the leading openness theologians, has introduced a new proposal of the providential working of God.[21] He focuses not on the rational and physical human being in deploying his argument but rather on the activity of spiritual creatures, Satan, and demons. Boyd approaches God's providence and evil in terms of a warfare worldview. He states:

> The good and evil, fortunate or unfortunate, aspects of life are to be interpreted largely as the result of good and evil, friendly or hostile, spirits warring against each other and against us.[22]

God is at war against satanic forces that brings evil upon us. His perspective comes out of the need to solve the problem of evil in the world.

As we have discussed above, the recent polemic regarding the problem of evil is crucially involved with the theological understanding of how God relates to creation. The challenge, however, is to recognize the intention of Scripture with hermeneutical precision and to avoid the dangers of reading theological prejudgments into the passage.

Having discussed the current theological debate regarding God's providence and evil, the present writer will discuss the problem of evil in prologue of the book of Job, specifically focusing on Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-7.

III. Satan (הַשָּׂטָן) in Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-7

In this section, the identity and role of הַשָּׂטָן in the prologue will be discussed because this issue plays a significant role in the current theological debate on God's relation to evil.[23]

Satan or the Satan?

Most commentators assume the scene of Job 1:6-12 is the Lord's celestial court assembly. However, the view of הַשָּׂטָן varies among scholars. Francis Anderson insists that the role and character of הַשָּׂטָן in Job is

[20] Ibid., 170.

[21] Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997); Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001).

[22] Boyd, *God at War*, 13.

[23] For example, as I have briefly mentioned in the previous section, the term is significant for Boyd's theological framework.

that of the Devil. He asserts that "the Satan may be the chief mischief-maker of the universe, and he is not God's minister of prosecution."[24] Holding same view, Hartley writes, "The numerous characteristics of השׂטן in vv. 6-12 suggest, he is contiguous with the later Satan, God's primary antagonist."[25] F. Delitzsch, furthermore, asserts that השׂטן is the God-opposing evil spirit.[26] These commentators consider the term השׂטן as a proper name, *Satan*, which means the headquarter of evil as much as the later Judeo-Christian tradition ascribes to him.

On the other hand, a number of commentators think differently. Marvin Pope claims that השׂטן is "one of the members of heavenly officials who comes to report and receive orders from God."[27] Similarly, Driver and Gray argue השׂטן is "one of the sons of the gods, or angels, the term signifies a distinct and permanent personality, who was designated in reference to his function of opposing or accusing men before God."[28] David Clines asserts that השׂטן is a description of function as "some kind of opponent or adversary."[29] Disagreeing that השׂטן is a proper name, Michael Gruenthaner argues that "it is a title designating the function which this personage exercises in the history of Job."[30] The argument of these commentators is that השׂטן is not a proper name *Satan* but a referent of a certain function or *the Satan*. Noteworthy first is that whenever the term is used in Job it is always articular (1:6, 7, 8, 9, 12; 2:1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7).[31] This evidence discourages us from identifying השׂטן with *Satan*. Most of the commentators agree that *Satan* is obviously developed from *the Satan* at a later period in Jewish history. However, as Clines reminds us, we should not impose the later meaning upon the former occurrence in Job when trying to establish the identity and role of השׂטן.[32]

[24] Francis I. Anderson, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1976), 82-3.

[25] John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 72.

[26] F. Delitzsch, *Job* (trans. F. Bolton; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 53.

[27] Marvin H. Pope, *Job* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1973), 9-10.

[28] Samuel R. Driver and George B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1921), 11.

[29] David J. A. Clines, *Job 1-20* (WBC 17; Waco: Word Books, 1989), 20-21.

[30] Michael J. Gruenthaner, "The Demonology of the Old Testament," *CBQ* 16 (1944): 16. Cf. Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 89.

[31] Cf. Zec 3:2 where the term also has the definite article.

[32] Clines, *Job 1-20,* 20. Cf. Carol A. Newsom, *Job* (NIB 4; Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 347. Newsom states, "…to read back into Job 1-2 the much later notions of Satan-the-devil is seriously to misunderstand the story of Job."

Semantic study suggests some insight regarding the usage of שׂטן in the Old Testament. The term שׂטן as a verb (used 6x) means to "bear a grudge, cherish animosity" in Psalms 38:20[21], 71:13, 109:4, 20, 29.[33] The distinctive nuance in the Psalms is the verbal accusation of the enemy or adversary against the psalmists.[34] However, השׂטן in Job 1, 2 and Zechariah 3:1 is definitely a heavenly accuser. In the narrative passages in the personal, legal, and political context, it is used as a noun with the meaning of the "one who is in opposition against person or nation (Num 22:22, 32; 1 Sam 29:4; 2 Sam 19:23; 1 Kgs 5: 18; 11:14, 23, 25)."[35] None of these passages seems to support the view that שׂטן is employed as the proper noun *Satan* who is against God. Ruling out the possibility that a specific demonic being is referred to in the Old Testament (a possible exception may be 1 Chron 21:1), Bruce Baloian states, השׂטן is merely "a member of the heavenly court with a role similar to a district attorney."[36] The semantic investigation proves that the rendering of the term השׂטן into *Satan* in so many bible translations has regrettably led the reader to misunderstand the book of Job. Whether השׂטן is a regular member or an intruder of the heavenly counsel is important in understanding his identity. Some scholars claim that השׂטן is an intruder of the heavenly counsel. They support their idea from the Hebrew גם־ and בתוכם.[37] Others argue השׂטן is a regular member of the divine assembly. It is difficult to be sure.

Syntactic analysis, however, offers some direction. Job 1:6 is a parallel structure with the repetition of the verb בוא and with an ellipsis of the infinitive and the prepositional phrase להתיצב על־יהוה (cf. 2:1).[38] The subjects of בוא in Job 1:6a and 1:6b are בני האלהים and השׂטן. השׂטן seems to be a being of the same class as בני האלהים.[39] These evidences persuade us to view השׂטן as one of the members of the divine counsel who reports the fulfillment of his tasks like בני האלהים. בתוכם (among them) remains ambiguous whether it implies the location or a member

[33] KBL, 918.

[34] Bruce Baloian, "שׂטן," *NIDOTTE* 3:1231-32.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid. Regarding the term "Satan" in 1 Chr 21:1, Newsom, *Job*, 348, explains that the term seems to appear as a proper name, yet Satan represents an externalization, or hypostasis, of divine anger. Cf. 2 Sam 24:1.

[37] They suggest that the Hebrew גם־ almost identifies the Satan as an intruder and in many places the proposition בתוכם is used to refer to it. Cf. James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom* (Atlanta: Knox, 1981), 101; Anderson, *Job*, 82.

[38] Cf. וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיָּבֹאוּ בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים לְהִתְיַצֵּב עַל־יְהוָה (6a) with גַּם־הַשָּׂטָן בְּתוֹכָם׃ וַיָּבוֹא (6b).

[39] Driver and Gray, *Book* of *Job,* 11; Pope, *Job,* 9-10.

of group. Having discussed the semantic and syntactic investigation, the present writer leans toward the idea that הַשָּׂטָן is a member of the celestial counsel who has his unique function like בני האלהים.

The Role of הַשָּׂטָן

It is worthwhile to discuss the role of הַשָּׂטָן in its narrative context within the prologue of the book of Job. There are two stages of the dialogue between God and הַשָּׂטָן in Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-6. In each scene the major initiator of the dialogue is God (1:7; 2:2). God first asks הַשָּׂטָן where he has come from, and it is God who singles Job out for consideration (1:8; 2:3). The answer of הַשָּׂטָן, מִשּׁוּט בָּאָרֶץ וּמֵהִתְהַלֵּךְ בָּהּ (from roaming through the earth and walking back and forth in it) indicates that he purposefully walked around the earth with the intention of finding human fault. God then proudly affirms twice that his servant Job is an unparalleled person in the world in regard to his righteous and blameless life (1:8; 2:3). הַשָּׂטָן apparently could not find any fault in the outward behavior of Job. הַשָּׂטָן, however, questions Job's motivation. He doubts Job's disinterested pious life (1:9). Radically diminishing the role of הַשָּׂטָן, Clines argues that God (of the story) himself was uncertain so he must test the loyalty of Job to restore his own self-confidence.[40] His argument, however, is not so compelling when we consider the narrative carefully. הַשָּׂטָן is a separate entity from God who clearly had a distinct role in the dialogue. Moreover, it was not the literary intention of the storyteller to show God's doubt by the use of the question הַשָּׂטָן. Not only God, but also the narrator affirms that Job is blameless and upright in the introductory verse of the book (1:1).[41] There is no place of doubt concerning Job's pious life for both God and the narrator.

Job 1:11 and 2:5 indicate הַשָּׂטָן is not autonomous. Even though he opposes God's assessment of Job, he does not have any authority to strike Job. There are limitations imposed upon him. Thus, in an aggressive tone he instigates God to test Job, which may prove God's confidence was wrong.[42] In response God permits הַשָּׂטָן to attack only Job's possessions but not Job himself (1:12), and again in the second stage God grants הַשָּׂטָן to afflict Job's body but insists that his life must be

[40] Clines, *Job 1-20,* 22. He argues from the notion of divine uncertainty and doubt in the Old Testament. He writes, "It is not primarily the Satan that God has to convince that a human's piety may be disinterested, but God himself." He further states, "The God of this story needs to wait for the infliction of the suffering to know Job's response."

[41] The same vocabulary is employed three times in 1:1, 8 and 2:3 to describe Job's pious life: אִישׁ תָּם וְיָשָׁר יְרֵא אֱלֹהִים וְסָר מֵרָע.

[42] Cf. אַל־תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ (Qal, Masculine, Imperative) in Job 1:12 and 2:5.

spared (2:6). The dialogue in Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-6 implies that הַשָּׂטָן acknowledges that Job's fate is in God's hands and that he himself has no power to do anything independently of God's will.[43] הַשָּׂטָן confesses with a grumble that God put a hedge around Job, his household and his possessions (1:10). He asserts that God is Job's protector and provider. The text demonstrates that his role is restricted to what God sanctions. In this sense he is certainly one of God's servants.

However, at the same time the narrative seems to resist the notion that הַשָּׂטָן is God's *faithful* servant. The image that emerges in the narrative is much more complex. He is undeniably a malicious one: he imputes wicked motives to God without reason and he afflicts Job with the most terrorizing calamities to induce him to curse God so as to prove that his evil suspicions were correct.[44] His image is portrayed as something more than an accuser. His attitude towards God is impudent. Page writes, "Satan's relationship with God is somewhat ambivalent. He is clearly under God's control, yet he does not hesitate to contradict God."[45] The notion of הַשָּׂטָן as the archenemy of God is not found in the prologue. However, the malicious evil image of הַשָּׂטָן is clearly depicted. His role and identity in the prologue is somewhat ambiguous. Surprisingly, the narrator does not give us a full account of the identity and role of הַשָּׂטָן. He is a secondary concern for the author. Yet the text clearly demonstrates that the activity of הַשָּׂטָן is restricted to God's permission and the satan's appearance is confined solely to the prologue. As far as the author of Job was concerned, God exercises absolute control over הַשָּׂטָן. This notion is further confirmed by Job's clear statement in 1:21 and 2:10.

IV. Evaluation of Arguments

The Classical View on God's Relation to הַשָּׂטָן

Regarding הַשָּׂטָן in the book of Job, Calvin asserts, "Satan appears in the presence of God to receive his orders, just as do the angels who obey spontaneously."[46] He considers הַשָּׂטָן as one of the members of the heavenly counsel who is under the authority of God. הַשָּׂטָן is thus not an archenemy of God. Then he says, "The manner and the end are different, but still the fact is, that he cannot attempt anything without the

[43] Sydney H. T. Page, *Powers of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 27.

[44] Gruenthaner, "Demonology," 17. Cf. Hartley, *Book of Job,* 72.

[45] Page, *Powers of Evil,* 29.

[46] Calvin, *Institutes*, 199.

will of God."[47] In approaching the evil and suffering in the prologue, Calvin elaborates on an idea that God is the creator of the world. He has created in such a way that all power and sovereign dominion must remain his. Job acknowledges that God holds everything in the world and so he submits himself to God (1:21). Calvin affirms that the harsh affliction that Job experienced is from God's hand.[48] Job is able to bless God in the midst of bitter suffering because he recognized God's justice and equity. Thus, whenever we are suffering we must not think that it happens without reason, but God has just cause to do it.[49]

Tiessen asserts that Satan and the evil spirits are not capable of acting contrary to God's sovereign purpose.[50] Although they may act on their own, the evil action accomplishes God's sovereign plan because "with middle knowledge God can plan and then accomplish it without violating the responsible freedom that he has given to his creatures."[51] Regarding the identity of *the Satan*, he agrees with Noll's view that *the Satan* is not merely a title designating an officer of the heavenly divine council, like a prosecuting attorney in a courtroom.[52] For Tiessen, *the Satan* himself is very powerful and is indeed the enemy, the opponent of God.[53] His argument, however, is mainly focused on God's authority and permission of evil. God permits affliction on Job and he also takes responsibility for its effect on Job (2:3, 42:11). Even though הַשָּׂטָן has the most formidable evil power and is the archetype of all evil beings, he is restrained or released by God.[54]

As discussed above, there is a slight difference between Calvin and Tiessen on this point. Calvin hesitates to use the term "permission," but instead he claims that the suffering upon Job is God's divine will, minimizing the role of הַשָּׂטָן in evil. God's meticulous sovereignty over creation, even over evil, is fully reflected in his argument. Calvin's view does not allow any dialogical tension between God and הַשָּׂטָן in the prologue. His view may be misunderstood because of his critique that God is the author of evil. However, his view seems to be well supported by Job 42:11 and Job's response to the evil in 1:21 and 2:10. Calvin's contribution to the debate is that even if God caused and willed the evil

[47] Ibid.

[48] John Calvin, *Sermon from Job* (trans. L. Nixon; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 18-30.

[49] Ibid., 30.

[50] Tiessen, *Providence & Prayer*, 296.

[51] Ibid., 297.

[52] Stephen F. Noll, *Angels of Light, Powers of Darkness: Thinking Biblically About Angels, Satan and Principalities* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 103-6.

[53] Tiessen, *Providence & Prayer*, 296.

[54] Ibid., 297.

upon Job, he is just and right. God's intention upon Job's suffering is good. In the light of the argument of the final chapter of Job, his view appears plausible. There is God's sovereign purpose in Job's suffering.

Tiessen then explains it as God's permission, admitting the formidable power of הַשָּׂטָן as God's opponent. Although the role of הַשָּׂטָן is somewhat ambiguous, there seems to be a smattering of tension between God and הַשָּׂטָן. Therefore, the term God's permission seems to be adequate only in the light of the prologue. His contribution to the debate is that his argument allows certain freedom to creatures even if it is under God's control. The freedom of creatures is however limited. He wants to be more nuanced in expressing his theological argument. However, as we investigated in the previous section, Tiessen's view of הַשָּׂטָן is not persuasive.

In general, the explanation of classical theism that evil and suffering in the book of Job is under God's divine authority is more compelling. God permits evil upon Job and it is from God rather than from Satan.

The Openness View on God's Relation to הַשָּׂטָן

Gregory Boyd from the openness circles proposes extensively God's relation to evil in general and to Satan in particular. His exegetical and theological view on this issue is provocative in the current openness debate. In his approach to the prologue of Job, he seems to deny that הַשָּׂטָן is a member of God's heavenly council. He suggests that "some distinction between the 'sons of God' who regularly form God's council and the *satan* seems to be implied here."[55] In order to support this idea he claims that הַשָּׂטָן, unlike the regular members of God's council, was not fulfilling his delegated duty because he was simply roaming about on the earth. Boyd states that "the answer of the satan in 1:7 and 2:2 is a surprising element to God, and it is an uncontrolled dimension to the *satan's* activity."

Furthermore, Boyd claims, "it is not Job who is on trial by the *satan,* but God for his conduct of world order, from the very beginning."[56] Job is just a sacrificial lamb of the evil accuser who opposes the Almighty. For Boyd, הַשָּׂטָן in the book of Job carries his own evil desires with excessive thoroughness. He seems to agree with James Morgenstern's view that Satan in the prologue is semi-independent of God.[57]

[55] Boyd, *God at War*, 146.

[56] Ibid., 147. The interpretation of these two verses would vary among scholars based on their theological view of divine foreknowledge. See James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001).

[57] Ibid.

Moreover, he proposes differently the notion of God's permission of *the satan's* suggestion in the prologue (1:12; 2:6). When he discusses Job's confession in 1:21 and 2:10, he argues that Job made a mistake because he misunderstood the mysterious sovereignty of God.[58] He asserts that the mysterious evil Job experienced does not stem from the arbitrary sovereignty of God, but from the complexity of creation and the warfare that engulfs it. He argues that Jesus never encouraged accepting evil as coming from God but rather he taught us to revolt against it as coming from Satan.[59] For Boyd, there is no element of God's permission in the prologue. He avoids the notion that God is the creator of destruction.

In addition, he claims God's character and incomprehensible task are against the cosmic evil forces, citing several verses from the book of Job (38:8, 10-11, 16, 31-32; 40:15-24; 41:1-24, 33-34). Boyd concludes concerning the problem of evil in the book of Job:

> Why evil happens is decisively not that it is the will of God. . . . It is rather a mystery of what goes on among the gods in "the great assembly" and in an incomprehensibly vast cosmos threatened by cosmic forces. In other words, the mystery of evil is located not on the heart of God but in the heart of humanity and in the hidden world between humans and God.[60]

Boyd's exegetical and theological approach to the problem of evil in the book of Job is significantly influenced by his theological assumption that God is in spiritual warfare against הַשָּׂטָן. As other open theists argue, he emphasizes the free activity of the creatures that God does not know or cause. God does not have any responsibility for Job's suffering because הַשָּׂטָן is the main cause of evil. Contrary to Calvin's view, Boyd minimizes God's role in Job's suffering. Boyd does not admit to gratuitous evil which some open theists insist. For Boyd, הַשָּׂטָן in the hidden world is the originator of evil in the world. His argument is basically from the belief that God is not the originator of evil and thus he attempts to find a cause of evil other than God. He wants to defend God as an all-good God, drawing attention to the spiritual domain. As Boyd claims, the prologue clearly demonstrates the story of the hidden world.

His argument however seems to be out of accord with the nuance of the narrative. There is the aggressive attitude of הַשָּׂטָן against God, but evidently he is restricted to God's authoritative permission. As we discussed in the previous section, God takes the initiative in the dia-

[58] Ibid.

[59] Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 224.

[60] Ibid.

logue with הַשָּׂטָן. There is no indication in the text that Job perceived the conversation between God and הַשָּׂטָן in the divine counsel. Job does not even consider the grave role of הַשָּׂטָן. But the readers know. Job must have a monotheistic view of God. And even if God permits severe suffering, for Job God is still good. In the epilogue, God demonstrates his goodness by compensating Job with long life, wealth, and children (Job 42:10-17; cf. Rom 8:28). Boyd's evaluation of Job's suffering in terms of the spiritual warfare between God and Satan appears to be the result of his theological presupposition. In the light of the narrative of the prologue and epilogue, Boyd's argument is not compelling.

In conclusion, evil itself that fell upon Job was the work of הַשָּׂטָן. But it was under God's sovereign permission. In God's created universe, even the activity of הַשָּׂטָן cannot step outside the boundaries of his sovereignty.

V. Conclusion

The evil that befell righteous Job causes controversy among scholars, questioning whether it was from God or from Satan. Classical theists argue that God is the first and primary cause of every occurrence in the world. They unanimously claim God never takes risks concerning evil. While the notion of הַשָּׂטָן as the archenemy of God in the prologue is not compelling, the malicious evil character of הַשָּׂטָן is. Even though his role and identity in the prologue is somewhat ambiguous, the text clearly demonstrates that the activity of הַשָּׂטָן, which is confined to the prologue, is restricted to God's permission. As far as the author of Job is concerned, God exercises absolute control over הַשָּׂטָן, and therefore over evil and blessing alike. This notion is further confirmed by Job's clear statement in 1:21 and 2:10. Calvin hesitates to use the term "permission," but rather he claims that Job's suffering is God's divine will, minimizing the role of הַשָּׂטָן. His claim seems to be supported by Job's confession and the narrator's commentary in Job 42:11 where the evil upon Job is depicted as God's sovereign will. Tiessen's argument of God's permission seems to accord well with the prologue. Therefore, the term "God's sovereign permission" is more adequate from the perspective of the narrator of Job. In God's universe, evil and suffering, even the activity of הַשָּׂטָן, cannot occur without God's sovereign permission. It is not Satan, but God who has the ultimate authority over the evil in the world. This view is problematic for some, but hopeful for others.